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across a farge manila envelope, care-

fully sealed, on which were written

even to exclaim, I tore the envelope

Inside was another envelope.

Kennedy had by this time finished

inpacking the box and was examining

a bottle which he had taken from it. "Come here, Walter," he called at

"I can't say," I confessed, getting

"Bring a piece of paper," he added

I went back to the desk where I had

been working and looked about hasti-

paper which I had taken from Ben-

nett's envelope, and I picked it up

Kennedy did not answer directly,

"A new system of fireproofing."

aughed Craig, enjoying my astonish

He continued to hold the paper in

the flame. Still it did not burn.

ties of the new fireproofer.

drawing of a fireplace.

as mystified as he.

tween his paws.

an air of hospitality.

plain, neat, homelike. On one side

was a large fireplace that gave to it

Suddenly Rusty woke up, his ears

until he came to Elaine's room.

hand and stirred, then awoke.

Hand and his emissaries.

turned to Rusty.

Joshua.

as if he was human.

Rusty gave warning of the Clutching

Rusty wagged his tail. Something

Elaine followed him down to the liv-

ing room. She went over and lighted

the electric lamp on the table, then

"Well, Rusty?" she repeated, almost

Elaine listened. Sure enough, she

She continued to listen in wonder,

Aunt Tabby woke up and shook

"Aunt Tabby! Aunt Tabby!" called

Around and around the room they

"Here, Miss Elaine," he urged press- the living room."

walked, still trying to locate the

ening her cap. "Joshua!

strange sounds.

"Here's one," I said, handing it to

up to go to him. "What is it?"

him. "What are you doing?"

"Ever see anything like

open and examined the contents.

blank piece of paper!

ered his money.

from the basket.

SYNOPSIS.

the figures "\$7,000,000." Too excited The New York police are mystified by erins of secreters and other crimes. The criminal states to the criminal is the warning like to the mysterious assassin is Taylor code, the insurance president. His anghier, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to ry to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend, at the determined effort which Elaine and raig Kennedy are making to put an end of his crimes, the Clutching Hand, as this trange criminal is known, resorts to all orts of the most diabolical schemes to ut them out of the way. Each chapter if the story tells of a new plot against their lives and of the way the great detective uses all his skill to save this prety girl and himself from death.

FIFTEENTH EPISODE

THE SERPENT SIGN.

Leacued by Kennedy at last from
terrible incubus of Bennett's perution in his double life of lawyer
master criminal, Elaine had, for rat time in many weeks, a feel-

ly. My eye fell on the blank sheet of sw that the strain was off, hower, she felt that she needed rest and hance to recover herself, and it had curred to her that a few quiet days ith "Aunt" Tabitha, who had been by nurse when she was a little girl, do her a world of good.

She had sent for Aunt Tabby, yet is fascination of the experiences ugh which she had just gone still hung over her. She could not resist thinking and reading about them as she sat one morning with the faithful Rusty in the conservatory of the

I had told the story at length in the Star, and the heading over it had aught her eye.

THE CLUTCHING HAND DEAD.

Double Life Exposed by Craig Ken- over to examine it more intently and

Perry Bennett, the Famous Young Takes Poleon - Kennedy Trail of Master Criminal's

As Elaine glanced down the column announced that Aunt Tabby, a she loved to call her old friend, had arrived and was now in the liwith Aunt Josephine.

aine dropped the paper and, folad by Rusty, almost ran into the to bring out the complete drawing of Oh, I'm so glad to see you," half-

ed Elaine, as she literally flung If into her nurse's arms. "I feel strong—and I thought that if I Just run off for a few days with behus in the country, where iter. You have always been so d to me. Marie! Are my things han Very well; then get my r maid left the room.

"Hiera your soul," mothered Aunt shay streking her soft, golden hair. I'm always glad to have you in that he house you bought me. And, faith, can Elaine, the house is a splendid lace to rest in, but I don't know that the matter with it lately. shua ways it's haunts."

unts?" repeated Elaine in d surprise. "Why, what do you

Marie entered with the wraps before Aunt Tabby could reply, and Jennings followed with the baggage.
"Nonsense," continued Elaine gayly,

as she put on her coat and turned to bid Aunt Josephine good-bye.

Elaine went out, followed by Rusty

and Jennings with the luggage. "Now for a long ride in the good fresh air," sighed Elaine, as she

leaned back on the cushions of the imousine and patted Rusty, the butler stowed away the

certainly did, if anything, se beauty of Elaine, and at arrived at Aunt Tabby's,

The par stopped and Elaine, Aunt rabby and the dog got out. There, waiting for them, was "Uncle" Joshua, as Elaine playfully called him, a former gardener of the Dodges, now a plain, honest countryman on whom the city was fast encroaching; a jolly old fellow, unharmed by the world.

Aunt Tabby's was an attractive, small house, not many miles from tion. Rusty was looking straight at the fireplace. Tabby's "Haunt?" Whatever it was, it sounded as if it came up from the very depths of the earth.

then ran to Aunt Tabby's bedroo New York yet not in the general line of auburban travel. door, on the first floor, and knocked.

Kennedy and I had decided to bring Bennett's papers and documents over We were now engaged in going over nurse, now fully awake and straight- shudder. "Bennett is dead." great mass of material which he llected in the hope of finding me clue to the stolen millions which he must have amassed as a re- nightclothes, Joshua yawning sleep- seen anything that looks like this?" sult of his villainy. The table was ily.

cked high. A knock at the door told us that the man had arrived and a moment later he entered, delivering a Finally Joshua went to a table ing plainly the wonder she felt.

heavy box. Kennedy signed for it drawer and opened it. He took out a "Why, yes," she answered. "That nd started to unpack it. I was hard at work when I came

near you!" The noises ceased at length, as

fore her closed eyes.

strangely as they had begun. Half an hour later they had all gone back to bed and were asleep. But Elaine's sleep now was fitful, a constant procession of faces flitting be-

stared into the semi-darkness. Was that face real, or a dream face? Was once? That man was dead. Who was

She gazed at the bedroom window holding the huge revolver tightly. peared a figure. Surely that was no dream face of the oxygen helmet. Besides, it was not the same helmet.

She sat bold upright and fired point-

blank at the window, shivering the opened that. It contained merely a glass. A second later she had leaped from the bed, switched on the lights With characteristic skill at coverand was running to the sill.

ing his tracks Bennett had also cov-Downstairs Aunt Tabby and Uncle Joshua had heard the shot. Joshua "Huh!" I snorted to myself, "conwas now wide awake.

I threw the paper into a wire basket on the desk and went on sorting stairs. "I saw-a face-at the window-

with some kind of thing over it!" gasped Elaine. "It was like one I saw once before." Uncle Joshua did not wait to hear

He looked about for signs of an in truder. There was not a sound.

He happened to look down at the round. Before him was a small box. He picked it up. "Here's something. though," he said. Jeshua went back to the house.

What's in it?' asked Elaine as he rejoined the woman. She took the curious little box and

unfastened the cover. As she opened but began to treat the paper with the it she drew back. There in the box it, after showing it to Wu. liquid from the bottle. Then he light was a little ivory figure of a man, "With the aid of the scient paper into the flame. The paper did eous figure.

day of our strange discovery of the they sped, until at last they came to fireplace done in sympathetic ink on a lonely turn in a lonely road. the apparently blank sheet of paper | Long Sin alighted and disappeared,

ing it on her. "take this-keep it Kennedy said nothing for a moment. | canny rappings began to be heard. | Long Sin looked at us a moment. Then he seized his hat and coat. "If you don't mind," he said, "we'll go back there with you."

Wu Fang, the Chinese master mind. had arrived in New York. Besides Wu, the inscrutable Long Sin, astute though he was, was a Suddenly she woke with a start and mere pigmy-his slave, his advance feet. There we found a passageway,

agent, as it were. New York did not know of the arit the bideous helmeted face that had rival of Wu Fang, the mysterious, yet. and uneven, and we stumbled, but kept dragged her down into the sewer But down in the secret recesses of Chinatown, in the ways that are devious and dark, the oriental crooks front of me, stopped suddenly and I room. knew and trembled.

Thus it happened that Long Sin was There, vague in the night light, ap not permitted to enjoy even the foretaste of Bennett's spoils which he had forced from him after his weird ransformation into his real self, the Clutching Hand, when the Chinaman had given him the poisoned draft that had put him into his long sleep.

He had obtained the paper showing where the treasure amassed by the Clutching Hand was hidden, but Wu Fang, his master, had come.

The night following his arrival, Wu "Wh-what was it?" he asked, puff- Fang was reclining on a divan, when ing at the exertion of running up his servant announced that Long Sin was at the door.

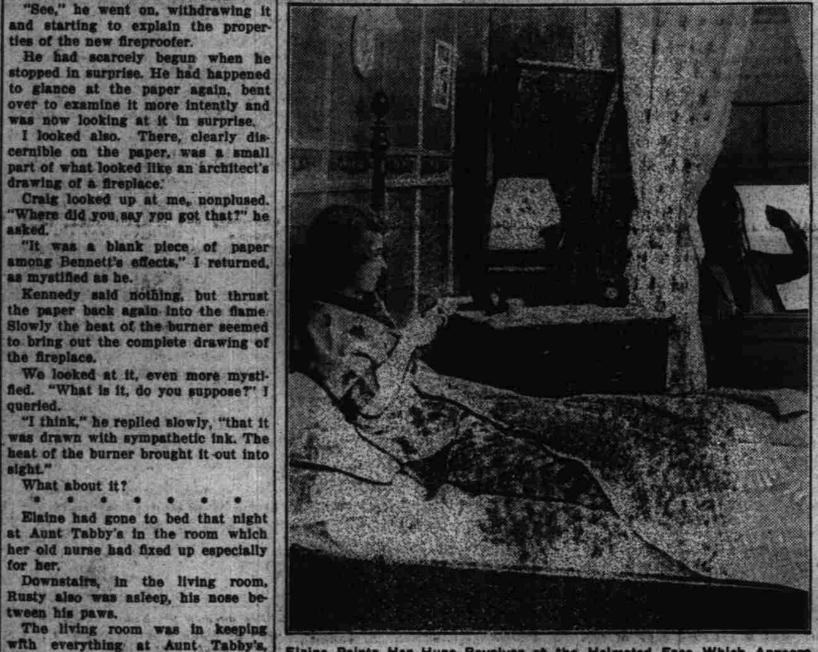
"Have you brought the map with you?" asked Wu.

Long Sin bowed low again, and drew from under his coat the paper which he had obtained from Bennett. For any more. He ran out of the room a moment the two, master and slave and into the garden beneath Elaine's in guile, bent over, closely studying it. At one point of the map Long Sin's bony finger paused over a note which Bennett had made:

"Beware of poisoned gas upon opening compartment." "And you think you can trace it out?" asked Wu.

"Without a doubt," bowed Long Sin. He went over to a bag near by, which he had already sent up by another servant, and opened it. Inside was an oxygen helmet. He replaced

"With the aid of the science of the ed a Bunsen burner and thrust the all hunched up and shrunken, a hid- white devil," purred Long Sin subtly, Outside. Wu had already ordered a car to wait, and together the two It was the afternoon following the drove off rapidly. Into the country



Elaine Points Her Huge Revolver at the Helmeted Face Which Appears

ing tube sounded and I answered it. "Why-it's Elaine," I exclaimed.

pointed at this fireplace. He stood a ment listening, then, with a bark Kennedy's face showed the keenest of alarm he sped swiftly from the pleasure at the unexpected visit. living room up the stairs at a bound "Tell her to come right up," he said quickly.

Elaine felt his cold nose at her I opened the door for her. "Why-Elaine-I'm awfully glad to "What is it, Rusty?" she asked, see you," he greeted, "but I thought mindful of the former days when you were rusticating."

"I was, but, Craig, it seems to me that wherever I go something happens," she returned. "You know, Aunt Tabby said there were haunts. I thought it was an old woman's fear -but last night I heard the strangest noises out there, and I thought I saw a face at the window-a face in a helmet. And when Joshua went out, this is what he found on the ground under | formed by the rocks. She had no need to repeat the ques- my window."

She handed Kennedy a box, a peculiar affair which she touched gingerly, and only with signs of the greatest heard strange noises. Was that Aunt aversion.

Kennedy opened it. There in the bottom of the box was a curious little ivory devil-god. He looked at it curiously a moment.

"Let me see." he ruminated, still regarding the sign. "The house you bought for Aunt Tabby once belonged to Bennett, didn't it?" Elaine nodded her head. "Yes, but

Kennedy had taken a piece of pa Together the old couple came out per from the desk where he had put into the living room, still in their it away carefully. "Have you ever

he asked, handing her the paper. Elaine looked at the plan carefully,

as Kennedy and I scanned her face. She glanced up, her expression show-Finally Joshua went to a table ing plainly the wonder she felt. huge, murderous-looking revolver. looks like Aunt Tabby's fireplace in | We were sitting about the room

in Bennett's effects, when the speak- | with a parting word of instruction | he had taken off. from Wu, who remained in the car. The Chinaman carried with him the heavy bag with the oxygen helmet. Long Sin hurried down the road until he came to a trolley pole, then on the floor, lay a bag of tools, opened was twenty minutes at least before with them. the next car would pass.

Quickly, almost monkeylike, he climbed up the pole, carrying with him the end of a wire which he had taken and then at the electric drill, and from the bag.

Having thrown this over the feed wire, he slid quickly to the ground again, then, carrying the other end of the wire in his rubber-gloved hand through the underbrush until he came to a passageway in the rough and uncleared hillside—a small opening

It was dark inside, but he did not hesitate to enter, carrying the wire and the bag with him.

It was nightfall before we arrived with Elaine at Aunt Tabby's. Kennedy lost no time in examining caping gas, and fell to the ground.

the fireplace. At one point in the grawing a peculiar protuberance was marked. Kennedy was evidently hunting for that. He found it at last and pressed the sort of lever. A small section at the side of the fireplace opened up, disclosing an iron ladder, leading down I don't see what that can have to do to the laboratory to examine them. - "Yes, my dear," answered the old with it," she agreed, adding with a into one of those characteristic hiding places in which the Clutching Hand

used to delight. "Let's go down and explore it," I plate, suggested, taking a step toward the ladder.

Kennedy reached out and pulled me back. Then without a word he pressed the little lever and the door closed. "I think we'd better wait a while, Walter," he declared. "I would rather hear Aunt Tabby's haunts myself."

We listened a moment, then Kennedy walked over to the fireplace, You can explore it with me now, Walter," he said quietly, touching the lever and opening the panel which disclosed the ladder.

Together, Craig and I descended into the darkness about eight or ten excavated through the earth and rock, along which we crept. It was crooked going slowly shead.

Kennedy, who was a few feet in almost fell over him. "What is it?" I whispered.

Long Sin had made his way from the opening of the cave to the point on the plan which was marked by a cross, and there he had set up his electric drill which was connected to the trolley wire. He was working furiously to take advantage of the fifteen minutes or so before the next car would pass.

It was evident that Long Sin had already been at work, digging and drilling through the earth and rock. He had gone so far now that he had disclosed what looked like the face of a small safe set directly into the

As he worked he would stop from time to time and consult the map. Then he would take up drilling again. He had now come to the point on which Bennett had written his warning. Quickly he opened the bag and took the oxygen helmet, which he adjusted carefully over his head. Then he set to work with redoubled energy. The man must have heard us approaching down the tunnel, for he

the drill ceased. From our vantage point around the end in the passageway we could see this strange and uncouth figure: "Who is it, do you think?" I whis-

paused in his work and the noise of

pered, crouching back against the wall for fear that he might look even around a corner or through the earth and discover us. As I spoke my hand loosened

lece of rock that jutted out and before I knew it there was a crash. "Confound it. Walter." exclaimed

Down the passageway the figure was now thoroughly on the alert, staring with his goggle-like eyes into the blackness in our direction. He was watched, and he did not hesitate a minute to act.

He seized the bag and picked his way quickly through the passage as if thoroughly familiar with every turn of the walls and roughness of the

Kennedy dashed forward and I followed close after him. We were making much better time

than our strange visitor and were gain-Suddenly he turned, raised his arm and dashed something to the earth, much as a child explodes a toy torpedo. I fully expected that it was a bomb; but, as a moment later, I found that Kennedy and I were still unharmed, I knew that it must be some

other product of this devilish genius. "A Chinese smoke bomb!" sputtered and coughed Kennedy, as he retreated a minute, then with renewed vigor endeavored to penetrate the dense and

opaque fumes. We managed to go ahead still, but the intruder had exploded one after another of his peculiar bombs, always keeping ahead of the smoke which he created, and we found that under its

cover he had made good his escape. At the other end of the passageway, up in the living room of the cottage, with all her remaining strength: the draft had carried large quantities of the smoke.

Long Sin, meanwhile, had started to reach the waiting car, with Wu, then with a will. paused and listened. Hearing no sound, he replaced the helmet, which all three pulled us out, unconscious but

Pursuit was now useless for us With revolvers drawn, we crept back along the passageway until we came again to the chamber itself. There,

"Caught red-handed!" exclaimed Kennedy with great satisfaction. He looked at the tools a minute

ward the safe. Then he turned on the current and applied the drill. The drill was of the very latest design and it went quickly through the lessly, leaping into the car and struc steel. But beyond that there was an gling to take off the helmet ar that

other thin steel partition. This Ken- drove away. "They may be here at nedy tackled next. The drill went through and he with-

drew it. Instantly the most penetrating and

nauseous odor seemed to pervade everything. Kennedy cried out. We staggered back, overcome by the es-Long Sin with his oxygen helmet on again, had returned to the pas-

ing back. He came to the chamber and there discovered us lying on the ground overcome. He bent down and, to his great satisfaction, saw that we were really unconscious.

sageway and was now stealthily creep-

Quickly he moved over to the safe and pried open the last thin steel

Inside was a small box. He picked it up and tried to open it, but it was locked. He paused for a moment to look at

us, then took out a piece of paper and a pencil and on the paper wrote: "Thanks for your trouble."

Beneath it was signed by his special stamp—the serpent's head, mouth ring?" when suddenly the most weird and un- open and fangs showing.

then a subtle smile seemed to apread over his face. At last he had us in

his power. He drew a long, wicked looking Chinese knife and carefully tested its edge. It was keen,

In the sitting room Elaine, Aunt Tabby and Joshua had been listening intently at the fireplace, but hearing They were now getting decidedly

worried. Finally the fumes which we had released made their way to the "I can't stand it any longer," cried Elaine. "I'm going down there to see

what has become of them." Aunt Tabby and Joshua tried to stop her, but she broke away from them and went down the ladder. Rusty leaped down after her.

Joshua tried to follow, but Aunt Tabby held him back. He would have gone, too, if she had not managed to strike the spring and shut the door, closing up the passageway.

Joshua got angry then. "You are making a coward of me," he cried. beating on the panel with the butt of his gun and struggling to open it. Elaine was now making her way as rapidly as she could through the tunnel, with Rusty beside her.

It was just as Long Sin had raised his knife that the sound of footsteps alarmed him. He paused and leaped to his feet.

There was no time for either to retreat. He started toward Elaine and seized her roughly, amountains Back and forth over the rocky floor they struggled. As they fought, she with frantic strength, he craftily, he backed her slowly up against the prop

that upheld the roof. He raised his keen knife. She recoiled. The prop, none too strong, suddenly gave way un

The whole roof of the chamber fell with a crash, earth and stone overwhelming Elaine and her assailant. By this time Joshua had left the louse and had gone out into the gar-

fireplace door. Of a sudden, to his utter amaxeum a few feet from him, it seemed as if the very earth sank in his garden, leaving a vawning chasm.

den to get something to pry open the

He looked, unable to make it out. Before his very eyes a strange for ure, the figure of Long Sin in his oxygen helmet, appeared, struggling up. as if by magic, from the very earth. shaking the debris off himself, as a dog would shake off the water after a olunge in a pond.

Long Sin was gone in a moment. Then again the earth began to move. A paw appeared, then a sharp black nose, and a moment later Rusty, too,

dug himself out. Joshua had run into the house to get a spade, when Rusty, fike a shot, bolted for the house, took the window at a leap and, all covered with earth, land ed before Joshua and Aunt Tabby. "See!-he went down there-now

he's here!" cried Aunt Tabby, pointing at the fireplace, then looking at the Rusty was running back and for h

from Joshua to the window. "Follow him!" cried Aunt Tabby. Rusty led the way back again to the arden, to the cave-in. "Elaine!" gasped Aunt Tabby.

By this time Joshua was digging fi-Aunt Tabby rushed up as Jos! 12 laid down the spade and lifted out

They were about to carry her toly the house, when she cried weakly, out "No-no- Dig! Craig-Walter!

she managed to gasp. Rusty, too, was still at it. Josia c work his way through the bushes to fell to again. Man and dog wo: ked "There they are!" cried Blaine as

> still alive. Though we did not know it, ther carried us into the house, While I's'n? and Aunt Tabby bustled about to get

something to revive us. At last I opened my eyes and say he looked hastily at his watch. It as though somebody had been working the motherly Aunt Tabby bending offer me. Craig was already revived. weak. but ready now to do anything Elsin; ordered, as she held his hand sp.l

> stroked his forehead softly. Meanwhile Long Sin had made his finally an idea seemed to strike him. way to the automobile, where his may-He took up a drill and advanced to- ter, Wu, waited impatiently.

"Did you get it?" asked Wu engariy. Long Sin showed him the bos. "Hurry, master!" he cried bresch-

any moment." The machine was off like a sho, and even if we had been free, we could not now have caught it.

Back in Wu's sumptuous apartment later. Wu and his slave, Long Cir. after their hurried ride, dismisest ad the servants and placed the little jox on the table. Wu rose and locant the door.

Then, together, they took a sign instrument and tried to pry off the lie of the box. The lid flew off. They gazed in

Inside was a smaller box, which which seized and opened. There, on the plush quabian, lay

merely a round knobbed ring' Was this the end of their great et pectations? Were Bennett's sellions merely mythical?

CWERIA The two stared at erch other in chagrin. Wu was the first to special on fill "Where there should have ben.

seven million dollars," La matered to himself, "why is there miv a mixic CTO BE CONTINUEDA

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